REVIEW

Internet/Intranet Design Shop

A TOOL TO SUIT ALL NEEDS

This Web-site publishing tool comes with a variety of tools for aspiring Webmasters.

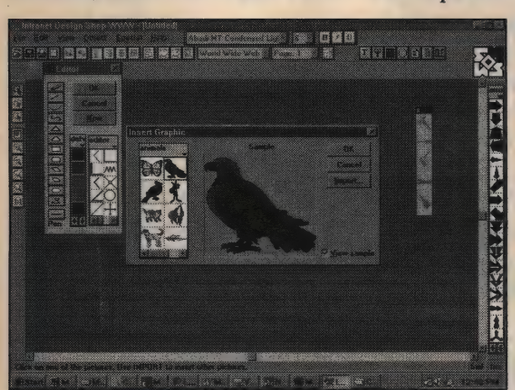
BY KEVIN SAVETZ

Internet/Intranet Design Shop is a great concept: a suite of tools featuring everything you could possibly need for creating and publishing a Web site. It tries to provide you with the necessities and the accessories of Web design: composing HTML text, creating graphics, churning out CGI programs, and more. But Web publishers may find that by trying to do so much, Design Shop has spread itself too thin.

The core of the package is Design Shop's HTML editor. Although the editor makes short work of placing text and graphics, users shouldn't stray too far from the manual while they're learning the ropes. Some of the functions, such as modifying a table or form, are not intuitive and will require help from the user's guide.

Design Shop includes a spell-checker, an image-map creator, and tools for maintaining pages on a Web site.

The program includes several essentials, including a spell checker, an image-map creator, and tools for maintaining and linking many individual pages on a Web site. However, it lacks other must-have tools, such as the ability to create Web pages with frames, to add META content tags, or to create many common types of lists with HTML.



Design Shop has its own graphics editor, making it easy to customize images and insert them into your Web page.

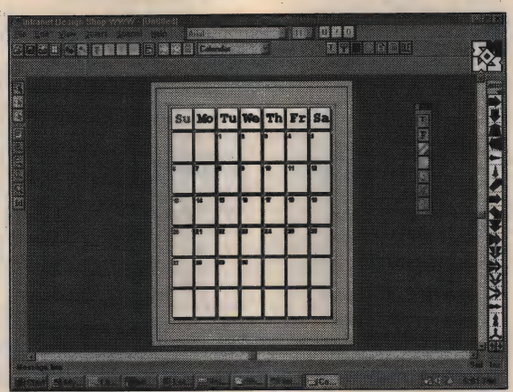
Design Shop's text functions are haphazard: Although you can specify text size, color, and alignment, there are many other text attributes that Design Shop doesn't allow you to control, such as blinking and scrolling banners. Design Shop doesn't firmly embrace any one HTML standard, old or new. Instead, it provides a smattering of features—and not necessarily the ones that you need. The HTML code that Design Shop creates is inelegant, laden with superfluous tags that make it difficult to read and cause pages to download slowly.

In addition to Web pages, the program includes tools for creating banners, posters, greeting cards, letterhead, calendars, coloring books, and business cards. But though we are at a loss to explain just how these admittedly entertaining functions fit into a product called Internet/Intranet Design Shop, Design Shop does a fair job with these functions. On the other hand, it lacks the advanced features of full-fledged page-layout programs, or even fun design tools like Print Shop.

Another application within Design Shop, Boomerang Business Graphics, provides the ability to create charts and PowerPoint-style presentations. This, too, seems ancillary to the product's primary purpose as a site-design tool.

Design Shop does come well-equipped with a nice variety of art tools, including a library of 8,000 clip-art images, 1,500 backgrounds, and 500 arrows, bullets, and other functional graphics. An image cataloger (which is a separate application) makes it easy to browse all of the included clip art plus your own media. The cataloger can import graphics from just about every conceivable file format.

For tweaking those images to perfection, Design Shop includes the MGI Photo Editor. This is a capable tool for basic image editing, including the usual assortment of tools for drawing, zooming in on, and rotating graphics. But advanced functions such as filters are not supported. Nor will clicking and dragging your image allow you to reposition it once you've placed it on your Web page—an unaccountable omission for a product that has been geared to a general audience.



In addition to Web pages, the Internet/Intranet Design Shop can create entertaining graphics such as greeting cards, banners, and wall calendars.

Whether you're creating a poster or a Web page, you'll find typing text into Design Shop can be a frustrating endeavor. On a 100MHz Pentium system, typing text produced an annoying flickering effect that made it impossible to read the screen.

PRODUCT LISTING

Internet/Intranet Design Shop

Boomerang Software
90 Concord Ave.
Belmont, MA 02178
617-489-3000
Fax: 617-489-1486
www.boomerangsoftware.com
Requires: 8MB RAM; 7MB hard drive space; CD-ROM drive; Windows 3.x, Windows NT, or Windows 95
List Price: $69.95

PERL SCRIPTS

If you want your Web pages to have the ability to process forms, Design Shop's HTML editor includes a feature that can generate common gateway interface scripts. The program creates simple Perl scripts that can send input from a form to a particular e-mail address. This is a helpful little tool, but it isn't very robust; it can't process data in any way except for e-mailing it, and its scripts will work only on Unix-style Web servers. The included CGI script generator can be a boon to those who don't know, or don't want to know, Perl, but if you are an experienced Web publisher, creating customized form-processing scripts by hand would probably be a relatively simple task.

In case you are not all that experienced, the package also includes a five-part tutorial on creating CGI programs with Perl. It features good information that will show a budding scriptwriter the basic rules for accepting and processing input from a form, but it is not professionally written. (The tutorial even describes itself as "very much a work in progress" and in need of refinements and additions.) If you just need to e-mail form input to a specific address, you can stick with the CGI script generator, but the tutorial delves into other tasks and explains the goings-on behind the scenes of CGI scripts.

Internet/Intranet Design Shop's is, at its heart, an earnest, well-intentioned Web-design product. Unfortunately, it tries to do too much and loses something in the implementation. A good idea that offers some unique features, Design Shop will disappoint more ambitious Web publishers who know what a truly great site-design tool can do. ▼